

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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People Power

Opposition groups vowed Thursday to use "people power" to oust President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who survived an impeachment move last year.



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To bare or not

Ah, the great swimsuit debate: To go maillot or bare the midriff with a two-piece bikini!



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The Filipino nurse: Caring for the world

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

Among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Philippines has taken pride in obtaining the highest quality of nursing education.

According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration publication, the Philippines has the highest quality nursing training with over 190 universities and colleges accredited by the Philippine Commission on Higher Education.

The publication, distributed at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Susupe, said that nursing institutions in the Philippines are at par with their counterparts in Canada, United States, Japan and Australia.

Philippine nursing schools graduate over 9,000 students every year and 80 percent eventually become full-fledged licensed nurses. "Over 340,000 registered nurses are listed in the roster of the country's Professional Regulation Commission," POEA said.

For the past years, Filipino nurses have become "much-sought after" health worker in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, North America and Africa. POEA also said they have become popular figures in major hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare institutions in the United Kingdom, USA, Ireland, KSA, UAE, Kuwait, Singapore, Malaysia and others.

POEA said the demand for healthcare and allied health professionals in the four major continents is attributed to the Philippine education system that is patterned after the U.S. curriculum.

"Classroom work and laboratory technologies, clinical internship, and community immersion adequately equip the nurse with the technical and clinical expertise required by the job."

THE FILIPINO Page 3

JOAN LOURDES D. LAVILLA

Labor of love

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

If there's a piece of advice that Philippine labor attaché Joan Lourdes D. Lavilla could give to Filipino nonresident workers here in the CNMI, it would be to remind them to always keep in mind the primary reason why they came here to the island.

Lavilla said that Filipino workers should never forget that they came here in the first place to support their family. She said it breaks her heart whenever family members in the Philippines seek her office's assistance just to determine the whereabouts of their family members here in the CNMI.

"It is indeed heartbreaking to find out that some Filipinos tend to neglect their families back home," she said. "I hope they'd be true to their original goals when they left the Philippines," she said.

Lavilla said she feels burdened by the prevailing situation of some Filipino contract workers here in the CNMI who continue to abandon their responsibilities back home.

"Invest and maintain a good relationship with your family because, in the end, your family will always be the ones helping you in times of your own need," she said, adding that the love of their families would always be there when they have to go back to their hometown in the Philippines.

Lavilla has been working as the Philippines' labor attaché here in the CNMI for two years now. In that span of time, she said it has been a very rewarding experience for her because she also stands in the front line in extending assistance to Filipinos in need.

A day is never normal when there are no Filipinos asking her office for help. She said she always makes it a point to listen to the inquiries or problems of Filipinos visiting her office at the Nauru Building in Susupe.

The natural scientist turned labor officer

Lavilla, turning 45 this month, took up a Natural Science degree at the University of the Philippines in the Visayas. She said she had always wanted to become part of the medical world but due to the limited financial resources of her parents at that time, she opted to take up a course that she believed

would cross both lines.

"Natural Science course can either get me into further medical studies or I can be a researcher if I don't make it," she said.

After finishing the course, Lavilla had a short teaching stint at the same university for one semester. Then she transferred to the U.P. Manila campus to also teach.

That teaching career came to an abrupt end when she was offered a job to join the then Ministry of Human Settlement's Processing Center, a government agency under the project of former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos. She couldn't recall anymore the years she spent in that office. "It was a long time ago," she quipped.

After several years in that department, she finally went to the Human Settlement Development Corp. until it was finally closed down when the regime of former president Ferdinand E. Marcos ended.

Her career, however, blossomed as she continued to work for another government agency, the Department of Trade and Industry, in 1989. She worked as an officer at the Office of Opera-

tional Planning until 1997.

She was then transferred to the Department of Labor and Employment's International Labor Affairs Services where she was appointed as Labor Representative to Saipan in 2003.

When she learned that she would be working in the CNMI, she said she was excited because it was her first out-of-the-country deployment. She already knew some information about the islands because the Commonwealth is also part of the reports on labor conditions.

She loves her work on the island as she has di-

LA-



PINOYNEWS

Mga benepisyo, serbisyo para sa kasapi ng OWWA

By **MARCONI CALINDAS**
REPORTER

Para sa mga overseas Filipino workers na magpahanggang ngayon ay hindi malinaw ang mga benepisyo bilang kasapi ng

Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, ang mga sumusunod ay halaw sa pinakabagong lathalain na inilabas ng OWWA Manila office para sa kaalaman ng mga OFW sa CNMI.

Ayon sa OWWA, ipinagka-

kaloob ng OWWA ang mga benepisyong social insurance, tulong-pautang, edukasyon at pagsasanay, at serbisyong sosyal at tulong pangkagalingang pampamilya sa mga kasapi nito batay sa kuwalipikasyon

at pagkakaroon ng OWWA ng pondo.

“Ang mga benepisyo at serbisyong ito ay bukod at karagdagan sa napapaloob sa employment contract, kaloob ng amo, o sa isinaad ng batas ng bansang

pinagtrabahuan.

Ang mga sumusunod ay ang mga tulong at serbisyo ng OWWA: paghahanap sa nawawalang OFW, pamimigay ng impormasyon at gabay, pag-aayos ng relasyong OFW-employer, pagdevelop ng mga materyales para sa PDOS, psycho-social na pagpapayo at outreach missions.

Maaari ding kumatawan ang OWWA para sa OFW sa mga employer, ahente, at awtoridad ng pamahalaan ng bansang pinagtrabahuan nito.

Tinutulungan din ng OWWA, mula sa Serbisyong Sosyal at Tulong Pangkagalingan ng Pamilya, ang mga kasapi nito na kailangang umuwi na makarating sa kanilang mga tahanan sa Pilipinas. Tinutulungan din ng OWWA ang mga kasapi nito sa pag-oorganisa ng pama-yanan, “capacity building”

at pautang panghanapbuhay mula Php 200,000 hanggang isang milyong piso.

Mga Benepisyong Edukasyon at Pagsasanay ay isang sangay ng mga benepisyong makakamit ng isang kasapi ng OWWA. Ang OWWA ay naglalaan ng anim na milyong piso kada taon para sa libreng “Skills-for-Employment Scholarship Program” para sa libreng teknikal at bokasyunal na pagsasanay ng kuwalipakadong kasapi.

Ang OWWA ay naglalaan din ng isang-daang iskolar sa apat hanggang limang taong kurso sa kolehiyo at nagkakahalaga ng tatlong-daang libong piso kada semester kada iskolar.

Meron ding ang OWWA na Seafarers Upgrading Program kung saan ang OWWA ay naglalaan ng 10 milyong piso taun-taon sa programang ito

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LABOR

FROM PAGE 1

rect interaction with the Filipino population, unlike her previous work where she merely sat behind a desk. She said she now enjoys being in the “frontline,” providing services to the Filipino community.

A loving mother and wife

Though she admits that cooking is not really her forte, Lavilla said she compensates through “division of labor” at home. She loves her husband Ariel’s luscious cooking, so when he cooks for dinner, she takes on the duties of washing the dishes and doing her share in the kitchen. She said her husband makes the best pancit molo and Arroz Valenciana.

Their 13-year marriage has brought them a loving son they call Kenji Riordan. Lavilla’s

son, now seven years old, currently studies at the Mount Carmel School.

During her spare time, Lavilla spends it with her family, spending quality time with her husband and child. Her family loves to frolic in the beaches of Saipan.

She used to read a lot but, due to her hectic schedule, the last book she got hold of was The Tao of Negotiation. Lavilla said she prefers self-enhancement books rather than fiction. She also likes to flip through the pages of women’s magazines.

A traveling ambassador

Lavilla said she enjoys traveling, although her past sojourns were mostly in Asia. Her work has already brought her to Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal.

Among the places she has visited, it was her short visit to Bali, Indonesia that struck her the most. She said she couldn’t



Philippine Labor Representative Joan Lourdes Lavilla, seated, is joined by Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Welfare Officer Mary Dait, left, with two of her dedicated staff. Photo taken inside Lavilla’s office in Nauru Bldg., Susupe.

forget the most beautiful sunset she has ever seen in one of the resorts in Bali, where hundreds of tourist gathered around just to marvel at the unique solar show. She was impressed with the resort’s dining set up when she was there.

One thing that she misses

right now, she said, is the leisure of doodling with pencils and charcoals again. She said she used to do sketches and portraits.

Lavilla said the last artwork she did was a portrait of her best friend way back home. “That’s one thing I truly want

MARCONI CALINDAS

LABOR FRONT

Minimum wage exemptions

By **FERDIE DELA TORRE**
REPORTER

Q: Who are exempted from the \$3.05 minimum wage? How overtime is calculated?

A: The job categories that are exempt from the minimum wage law are farmers, houseworkers, fishermen, and seamen. Unless a worker belongs to one of these exempt categories, he or she must be paid the hourly minimum wage for the first 40 hours worked each week. For each hour worked over 40 hours per week, a worker is entitled to a 1.5 times his or her normal hourly wage rate. Any period of time that a worker is required by his or her employer to be present at any location is considered to be working hours for the purpose of determining wages and overtime.

Q: If an alien worker has been convicted of assault and driving while under the influence of alcohol, are these ground for his or her deportation from the Commonwealth?

A: Yes. Assault and DUI are misdemeanor offenses. An alien can be deported if he or she is convicted of two misdemeanors. The other grounds for deportation include the following:

- You entered the CNMI without inspection or at a time and place other than a designated port of entry.
- You have become a public charge.
- You have been convicted of a felony.
- You have been convicted of any crime of moral turpitude.
- You have been convicted of any firearms control offense.
- You have encouraged, assisted or aided in any way other aliens to enter the CNMI in violation of law.
- You have failed to maintain a valid passport.

Q: Do alien workers have the right to have their work permit renewed automatically?

A: No. The decision to renew a work permit will be made by the employer and becomes effective only after the Labor director or his or her designee approves it.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune's* office on the second floor of the Century Insurance Building on Beach Road, Garapan.

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How to hire a Filipino work-

By **MARCONI CALINDAS**
REPORTER

Many local company representatives visit the Philippine Overseas Labor Office at the Nauru Building in Susupe asking for the requirements on the hiring of overseas Filipino workers.

Below are some notes on what to accomplish and submit in order for interested companies to avail themselves of the world-class services of the Filipinos based on the publication POLO has released in the CNMI.

How to hire Filipino workers:

1. A prospective employer interested to hire Filipino workers may choose from the official list of licensed private employment agencies, either land-based or sea-based, available at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office or the Philippine Consulate General in Susupe. They may also visit the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency website: www.poea.gov.ph. The employer may also write the POEA for agency referral assistance.

2. An employer who has identified a Philippine agent, which

will source his/her manpower requirement, must submit the recruitment documents to the POLO office and Philippine Consulate office for verification. This process ascertains the existence of the company or project and the need for Filipino manpower.

For land-based principals, they should submit: special power of attorney or service and recruitment agreement, master employment contract with the minimum contract provisions, and manpower request.

Should there be no POLO at

the jobsite the employer shall undergo the POEA accreditation process where the local agent submits to the POEA items mentioned above and the visa or equivalent documents.

For manning principals, they should submit the manning agreement containing, among others, the responsibilities of both principal and manning agency with respect to

the employment of seafarers, special power of attorney, list of ships and their particulars including IMO number, crew complement, valid business license registration certificate, or equivalent document, or proof of existence of business validated or certified by the issuing authority in the host country, and other documents which the POEA may find necessary.

The booklet also stated that the foreign principal, who acts as a direct employer of a land-based worker, may be registered to more than one Philippine agency while a foreign principal who is licensed to operate as a foreign placement agency may be registered and accredited to a maximum of two Philippine agencies, subject to the conditions prescribed by the POEA.

OFW E-Card: Huwag umalis ng wala

By **MARCONI CALINDAS**
REPORTER

Hawak mo pa ba ito? Umaal ka ba ng hawak mo ito? Itinatago mo bang mabuti ito? Huwag kang aalis na wala ito, ayon sa Overseas Workers Welfare Administration dito sa Saipan.

Ang OFW E-Card ang tinutukoy nila dito, isang card na kaloob ng OWWA at ng Philippine Overseas Employment Agency sa Pilipinas.

Ang Overseas Filipino Worker E-Card, ayon sa mga lathalaing isinalabas ng OWWA sa Saipan, ay isang permanenteng "identification card" para sa lahat ng OFW, hindi lamang sa CNMI, bagkus maging sa ibang bansa sa mundo kung saan naninilbihan ang bawat Filipino.

"Ito ay ibinibigay ng libre ng Department of Labor and

Employment sa pamamagitan ng OWWA at POEA," ayon sa lathalaing.

Ang E-card ay kailangan ng bawat Filipino sa Saipan dahil ito ay katibayan na sila ay isang tunay na OFW at isang kasapi ng OWWA. Ito ay nagtataglay ng kanilang litrato at pirma at mayroong personal at permanenteng OFW ID number. Ito rin ay nagsisilbing Overseas Employment Certificate ng bawat OFW.

Ang OWWA E-card ay maaari ring gamitin bilang ID upang makuha ang mga benepisyo bilang kasapi ng OWWA. Ito rin ay magsisilbing "pass" para sila ay hindi na pagbayarin ng "travel tax" at "terminal fee" sa alin mang paliparan sa Pilipinas.

Ang card na ito ay maaaring magamit bilang "International ATM card" ng bawat OFW. "Kung gusto nyong magbukas

ng account sa mga kasaping bangko, ang 'initial deposit sa pagbukas ng ATM account ay 50 pesos lamang."

Maaring gamitin ang ATM card na ito upang mag-withdraw sa alinmang Bancnet, Megalink or Expressnet ATM sa Pilipinas or kaya naman ay sa alin mang VISA Plus ATM sa abroad. Ang mga kaukulang ATM 'transaction fees' na ibabawas ay ang mga susunod: \$3 para sa bawat tagumpay na ATM withdrawal, \$1 para sa bawat balance inquiry at \$1 para sa bawat ATM transaction na hindi natuloy sa anumang kadahilanan.

Ang card ay magagamit ring pang-shopping, pang-grocery o pang-gimik sa pamamagitan ng VISA Electron feature nito. "Iprisinta lamang ang card sa mga VISA Electron na tindahan at ang halaga na iyong nagastos ay ibabawas sa pondo ng iyong account," ayon sa babasahin.

Kapag nawala sa anumang dahilan ang OWWA E-card, mangyaring i-report kaagad ito sa OWWA office o sa POLO office dito sa CNMI.

MGA

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para sa mga marinong kasapi. Ang bawat kuwalipikadong iskolar ay pinagkakalooban ng mula Php1,200 hanggang Php7,500 para sa pagsasanay.

Ang bawat kasapi ay maaaring humiram o mag-loan sa OWWA ng kanilang pambayad sa placement fee, pambili ng damit, perang baon, at iba pang gastusin. Ang bawat kasapi ay maaaring manghiram ng hanggang Php40,000 piso. Maaari ring manghiram ang kasapi ng hanggang Php40,000 para sa dagliang pangangailangan ng pamilya na inendorso ng kasapi.

Ang bawat kasapi ng OWWA ay protektado ng mga sumusu-

nod na insurance sa panahon ng kanyang kontrata: Life Insurance, Php100,000 para sa natural na pagkamatay at Php200,000 para sa pagkamatay mula sa isang aksidente.

Ang "Disability and Dismemberment Benefits" ay nagkakahalaga mula Php2,000 hanggang Php50,000. Para naman sa "Total Disability Benefit" ay Php100,000 for permanent disability. Ang bawat kasapi na pumanaw ay makakakuha rin ng benepisyo panglibing na nagkakahalaga ng Php20,000 kada kasapi.

Para sa karagdagang kataunungan, pumunta o tumawag lamang sa OWWA office na matatagpuan sa Nauru Bldg. sa Susupe na may telepono bilang 235-6992 o mag-email lamang

sa owwasai@vzpacifica.net o sa owwasai@pti.com.

THE FILIPINO

FROM PAGE 1

An extra advantage of the Filipino nurses, according to the publication, is the Filipino nurses' facility and ability to express themselves in English. POEA said that, with good command of the language they are able to communicate effectively with their employers,

colleagues, and their patients.

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Estrada may be released

By **CHRISTINE AVENDANO, NORMAN BORDADORA**
INQUIRER

Three religious leaders—Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal, Bro. Mike Velarde of El Shaddai and Iglesia ni Cristo Executive Minister Eraño Manalo—are willing to serve as guarantors for deposed President Joseph Estrada in the event that he applies for temporary freedom.

This was disclosed Thursday by Michael Defensor, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's chief of staff, who also said Malacañang would not oppose the arrangement. Defensor is leading reconciliation talks between the administration and Ms Arroyo's ousted predecessor.

Defensor said the matter had been discussed with religious leaders and their representatives for some time now. He said the most recent of the discussions occurred in the last two

weeks, but this time with INC representatives and with Vidal.

"The three leaders are willing to guarantee [that] Estrada is not a flight risk and that he would be placed under their recognizance," he said in a phone interview.

Asked whether Ms Arroyo was aware of the position taken by the religious leaders regarding Estrada, Defensor said: "I think the President is aware since the three leaders had their own discussions with her on this.

"There's no personal or vested interest in this. [It] is for the national interest."

Estrada himself told the Inquirer that he and Vidal met on Wednesday to discuss his possible release on the recognizance of the prelate and the two other religious leaders.

He said his release on recognizance would last for only 30 days and was meant for him to effectively prepare for when he takes the stand to defend him-

self from plunder and perjury charges before the Sandiganbayan.

Estrada said he was "thankful" to the three religious leaders for "helping" him.

"If [they] think I am guilty, they would [stay] away from me," he said by phone from his vacation estate in Tanay town, Rizal province, where is under house arrest.

Reconciliation

Estrada, however, appeared wary of the Sandiganbayan's eventual decision on his planned release on recognizance.

"I don't know what the court thinks. I would not know how [the justices would] decide," he said.

Asked if his planned release on recognizance also involved the President's chief of staff, Estrada said: "You know, Secretary Defensor is broad-minded. He knows [I'm not a flight risk]."

In Defensor's reckoning, the plan

could only succeed: "How can you go wrong with that? The three leaders have a strong following and are loved by our people."

Besides, he said, the three religious leaders "understand what is happening to our country."

The Palace has become more active in its reconciliation efforts with Estrada "now that the hardliners are not in government anymore," Defensor said.

He was apparently referring to some members of the "Hyatt 10," a group of key government officials who quit their posts in July last year and demanded that Ms Arroyo do the same. The resignations stemmed from allegations that the President manipulated the vote in the May 2004 elections.

Defensor acknowledged that civil society leaders who were formerly in the government had blocked Malacañang's efforts to reconcile with Estrada.

He said the arrest of Estrada in 2001, which angered the followers of the ousted President, was "also their (the civil society leaders') idea."

Position of strength

Defensor said Malacañang was "talking with [the Estrada camp] from a position of strength."

"The economy is strong, the business sector is upbeat, we have a professional military and police unaffected by destructive politics," he pointed out.

Defensor made clear, however, that it would still be the court, and not Malacañang, that would determine the final action on the matter.

Estrada noted that the Sandiganbayan special division hearing the plunder and perjury cases against him had already denied his petition for bail, which would have allowed him to prepare for his testimony in court.

"There is no flight risk. Flight is evidence of guilt, isn't it?" he said.

Estrada reiterated his claim that, after EDSA II people power uprising, then Justice Secretary Hernando Perez had said that no charges would be filed against him on condition that he leave for a country of his choice.

"If I really wanted to escape, I would have accepted [the offer]," he said.

Estrada also said he needed to be released from house arrest so he and his lawyers could plan his defense well.

"It's two hours coming here and another two hours [going back to Manila]. When we start discussing and we still have to eat, that's another two hours," he said.

"My lawyers (former fiscal Jose Flaminiano and former senator Rene Saguisag) are also already old," he added.

He likewise pointed out that his defense team had other cases to attend to.

Former El Shaddai spokesperson Mel Robles said he was aware "even earlier than last year" that Velarde was "willing to be among the guarantors."

Asked whether this supposed willingness on Velarde's part still stood, Robles said: "I see no reason for any change in his policy."

Robles also claimed to know that Cardinal Vidal was also willing to serve as a guarantor.

A source privy to the details of the meeting between Estrada and Vidal said the cardinal had asked the ex-President not to speak against the administration.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to divulge details of the meeting, said Vidal also asked Estrada if he was funding the activities of anti-Arroyo members of the military.

Estrada was said to have told Vidal that the family of the mutinous Magdalo soldiers had written him asking for help and support from his Kawal Foundation.

The source quoted Estrada as saying that everything was "in writing."

Doubts

But last night, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez expressed doubt that Estrada could be released on recognizance.

"I doubt a recognizance is tenable," he said, noting that Estrada was charged with the non-bailable offense of plunder.

Gonzalez explained that recognizance was like applying for bail: "But instead of bail, a person is placed under the recognizance of a reputable person who will answer for him."



President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, center, gestures as she talks to the newly promoted officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Thursday, Feb. 16, 2006 at the Malacañang Palace in Manila. Arroyo called a command conference with the officers of the major services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines amid intensifying coup rumors.

Groups vow 'people power' vs GMA

By **OLIVER TEVES**
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Opposition groups vowed Thursday to use "people power" to oust President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who survived an impeachment move last year.

Groups that spearheaded street protests last year demanding Arroyo's resignation over alleged cheating in the 2004 elections and corruption plan a mass rally next week on the 20th anniversary of the near-bloodless 1986 uprising that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

"Today, we declare our unhesitating resolve to build up 'people power' against those who have used their power to lie, to cheat and to steal," former Vice President Teofisto Guingona said in a statement he read for the opposition umbrella, Coalition for Truth.

Speaking at the foot of a monument at site of the 1986 revolt, Guingona said the uprising has "continuing rele-

vance against those who have betrayed it, those who denigrate it and those who repress it."

Former Agrarian Reform Secretary Horacio Morales said the coalition groups aim to "terminate this illegitimate regime and establish a transition council" to run the country.

Calls for "people power" have come amid intensified rumors of a coup.

Arroyo called her top military commanders to the presidential palace Thursday, but officials played down the significance of the meeting, calling it part of a regular quarterly command conference.

A top military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he's not authorized to divulge sensitive information publicly, said the generals discussed with Arroyo a new plot against her government by disgruntled soldiers.

Junior officers were being recruited to join the plot, which involved unseating Arroyo by force and replacing her with a civilian-led revolutionary council, the official told The Associated

Press. The official attended the meeting with Arroyo.

The military learned of the conspiracy from seized documents and informants, the official said, but added the armed forces were not alarmed because the group appeared to have limited capability and has been finding it difficult to get recruits.

Arroyo asked the generals during the meeting to intensify efforts to boost morale to discourage troops from backing "military adventurers," the official said.

Military spokesman Col. Tristan Kison, meanwhile, said officials have learned of a plan by retired and active officers to unfurl anti-government streamers during an alumni reunion at the prestigious Philippine Military Academy in northern Baguio city on Saturday. Arroyo was not scheduled to attend the reunion, officials said.

Strict security would be enforced to prevent that plan, called "Oplan Hackle," Kison said, without providing other details.

RP police on red alert amid protest calls, coup rumors

MANILA, Philippines (AP)—Police in the Philippine capital went on heightened alert Friday, a day after authorities uncovered an alleged new coup plot against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and opposition groups called for a massive rally next week.

Metropolitan Manila police chief Vidal Querol ordered police units to increase road patrols and checks and "monitor well and be ready for any contingency."

He didn't elaborate, but on Thursday, a top military official said Arroyo met with top military brass to discuss a new plot against her allegedly involving disgruntled soldiers replacing her with a civilian-led revolutionary council.

The military, however, downplayed any immediate danger, saying the plotters appeared to have limited capability.

During the meeting, Arroyo asked the generals to intensify efforts to boost morale to discourage troops from backing "military adventur-

ists," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to divulge sensitive information publicly.

Military spokesman Col. Tristan Kison, meanwhile, said officials have learned of a plan by retired and active officers to unfurl anti-government streamers during an alumni reunion at the prestigious Philippine Military Academy in northern Baguio city on Saturday. Arroyo was not scheduled to attend the reunion, officials said.

Strict security would be enforced to prevent that plan, called "Oplan Hackle," Kison said, without providing other details.

Also Thursday, an opposition umbrella group, Coalition for Truth, which spearheaded street protests last year demanding Arroyo's resignation over alleged cheating in the 2004 elections and corruption, called for a mass rally next week on the 20th anniversary of the 1986 uprising that toppled late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

PINOYSTYLE

‘PBB’ celebrity housemates an engagingly varied lot

By **NESTOR TORRE**
INQUIRER

The “celebrities” competing in the new edition of “Pinoy Big Brother” turned out to be not as popular as expected.

But they’re an engagingly varied lot—from now gaunt Rustom Padilla to now plump Aleck Bovick; from hunks Christian Vasquez and Zanjoe Marado to one-legged Rudy Fernandez and singer-comic Budoy Miravilles; from classy Bianca Gonzales to palaban Keanna Reeves—etc.

They’re definitely more interesting than the unknowns who made up the first batch of “PBB” “housemates,” so time passes faster as we watch the show’s current edition.

We also like the reality challenge’s “back to basics” style, because it forces the “celebrities” to live much more simply than they’re used to. And the pared-down lifestyle could pressure some of them to reveal aspects of themselves that they’ve heretofore kept from view.

That could lead to realizations that would expand viewers’ understanding of what “celebrity” really is—and isn’t.

The inclusion of people from different parts of the country could also enrich viewers’ appreciation of our range of diverse regional characteristics, which could help explain why we have such a hard time getting our act together as a people.

And living for two months with one-legged Rudy should add a lot to the housemates’ understanding of other disabled people—with the show’s viewers learning along with them.

However, the show has gotten off to a shaky start, choosing to focus instead on teapot tempests involving some of the housemates, incipient crushes here and there, a little flirtation, and emotional outbursts as some celebrities miss their loved ones.

The show can be much more than this, so we’re a bit impatient to see it find its proper pace.

We also sense that some celebrity housemates are pacing

themselves in terms of full participation in the program’s activities. The instinctive rule appears to be: the more popular you are, the more you hedge your bets for the moment, to avoid overexposure and peaking too early.

This makes sense, because two months is a long time, and early favorites could end up biting the dust much too soon. So, the real celebrities in the batch are benefiting from the experience that all their years in show biz have given them.

That could be why the more veteran likes of Rustom, John Prats and Christian haven’t really made their mark on the show to date, while relative newbies like Budoy, Keanna

and Mich Dulce are all over the place, talking a blue streak and “entertaining” anyone in sight.

As for the crybabies who keep weeping themselves a river, they ought to realize that viewers don’t sympathize with them—because they knew all along that they were in for the long haul, right? So all those tears during the very first week of the program come off as both immature and self-serving.

‘Hearts in Season’

Together for the first time, ’80s divas Janet Basco, Ivy Violan and Dulce perform in the Valentine concert, “Hearts in Season,” at the Manila Peninsula Rigodon Ballroom. Call 776-

9359 or 0917-9011333.

With more than 20 years of performing, all three divas are multi-awarded in the field of live entertainment.

Directed by Toti Fuentes, the Valentine show will also feature painter-singer George Tagle and musical theater performer Miguel Castro.

‘American Idol’

The Fifth season of “American Idol” is telecast live on Star World every Wednesday and Thursday at 6 p.m., with replays at 8 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.

Amadis’ travel book

“The Archipelago Sanctuaries,”

the latest travel book by Amadis’ Ma. Guerrero, was well-received at its launch at Rizal Towers, Rockwell Center, recently.

It is now available at National Bookstore, Powerbooks and other outlets. The book’s being distributed by Anvil Publishing.

Hilera signs EMI contract

After outperforming eight other bands from top schools, Hilera, a trio from Kalayaan College, topped the Nescafe Soundskook inter-collegiate band competition.

Last Feb. 8, the group signed a contract with EMI Music.

By **PAUL DAZA**
INQUIRER

A recent episode of ABS-CBN’S “Pinoy Big Brother Celebrity Edition” was a surprisingly engaging, heart-tugging viewing experience. With the pall of the Ultra tragedy hanging over the network, and the show’s use of certain elements earlier used in GMA 7’s “30 Days”—a reality show about has-been actors aching for a comeback—there were some doubts that ABS-CBN could capture lightning in a bottle twice.

Yes, there had been some curiosity about who made it to Kuya’s guest list, but would viewers want to make the show a nightly habit? When the roster was announced during a welcome party at the Baywalk on Roxas Boulevard, many must have gasped on seeing that the new housemates included sexy actresses not known for mincing words, a bleached and frighteningly thin Rustom Padilla, and an athlete with a mechanical leg.

With such a cast, how could anyone resist sampling the show at least once?

What made the earlier celebrity-free Pinoy Big Brother so compelling to watch was that it put a bunch of ordinary Pinoys in a fish bowl for 100 days and required them to carry out tasks that would test their social skills, creativity, ingenuity, and physical prowess—all for the promise of taking home millions of pesos in cash and other prizes.

Would the show’s concept work with celebrities, who are used to living in a fish bowl anyway? As such, wouldn’t there be something less real about their behavior?

Remaining doubts about the show’s entertainment value very likely vanished during last Thursday’s PBB, an edition that focused on surprises that Kuya and the housemates had lined up for unsuspecting birthday boy Christian Vasquez.

Whether it’s because they are good actors or they weren’t acting at all, nothing seemed phony or scripted about the way the housemates behaved. Internet chatroom favorite Budoy spoke emotionally to Big Brother about struggling artists whose works aren’t appreciated, while “Kilabot ng Senado” Keanna Reeves looked genuinely frightened at the prospect of having to read a letter aloud. (A subtitle naughtily speculated that she was afraid the document she had to read was written in English. It wasn’t.)

The episode’s emotional highlight was surely the scene where Christian Vasquez sobbed uncontrollably in the confession room as he watched taped birthday greetings from his parents and two little boys, and reading letters they wrote him. Never before had the actor been so emotionally naked in any of his TV or movie roles, and it was easy to forget that Vasquez spent nearly every other scene in PBB topless, all the while being photographed.

To bare or not to bare

By **CHECHE V. MORAL**
INQUIRER

Ah, the great swimsuit debate: To go maillot or bare the midriff with a two-piece bikini!

If the surge of new swimwear brands, both imported or locally designed, is anything to go by, gone are the ghastly days when Filipinas trooped to the beach in baggy tees and shorts.

A newfound sensibility has Filipinas mustering enough daring to bare some flesh and don not just stylish swimwear, but also discard the unflattering and decidedly impractical T-shirt-and-shorts combo. Just think of the discomfort and potentially disastrous results of wading in deep waters in heavy, soaked clothing.

It's impressive how the Filipina has found ease in her own skin, enough to enjoy the multitude of swimwear choices available for her trip to the beach or a lazy

lounge by the pool.

It's easy to think the more conservative types would opt for a maillot (pronounced mäyo), which, strictly by definition, means a one-piece swimwear that offers greater coverage, as opposed to a bikini that requires baring a little bit more than one's midsection. But with the varied options available these days, that is no longer the case. Many maillot styles, with cut-away sides or cut down to there, are just as coquettish and sexy as the next bikini.

"I think it's simply your comfort level that dictates the type of suit you prefer," says Cat Juan, a model who prefers bikinis. "I wouldn't necessarily say that girls who wear maillot are less liberal than women who wear bikinis." Juan herself owns one sport maillot "for doing laps."

An avowed water baby who's recently learned to surf, Faith Amigo says she opts for string bikinis simply because it allows her to catch a tan. She also finds bikinis flattering to her body type.

Juan, while partial to bikinis, owning over a dozen sets, however warns of the downside when

doing water sports. "[Donning a bikini] increases your chances of having an embarrassing moment. I should know!"

More than the cut, fabric and quality are top considerations for Kat Tantoco-Lo-bregat. The petite entrepreneur wears both maillots and bikinis. "If the cut fits, [both] styles can be sexy, chic and glam."

Ditto, says Juan. "I choose suits that have both the cut that flatter my pear-shaped body and the quality to last through numerous hours in the water."

While she concedes there are many affordable brands with flattering styles now available in stores, the dusky young model says she's always willing to loosen the purse strings for a good swimwear. "I think an excellent swimsuit is a good investment and a little difficult to come by."

Ultimately, the question is not so much about which girl, er, swimwear style, is the more fun, but which girl has enough sense to pick out a cut that brings out the beach goddess in her.



How do I love thee? Let Pinoy writers count the ways

Top Filipino writers across the archipelago recite their favorite romantic passages from literature:

Ernesto Yee, Dumaguete-based poet, fictionist and lawyer:

"to be the air that inhabits you for a moment only. I would like to be that unnoticed & that necessary."

—Canadian poet-novelist Margaret Atwood

Rudy Alano, Bicol-based writer:

"[Maria]... was lovely. She was tall. Beside my brother Leon, she was tall and very still... [And] in the darkened hall the fragrance of her was like a morning when papayas are in bloom."

—"How My Brother Leon Brought Home A Wife," by Manuel Arguilla

Ricardo de Ungria, poet, anthologist, teacher and chancellor of University of the Philippines in Mindanao:

"the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a woman's body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldn't answer first... yes

and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes"

—"Ulysses," by James Joyce

Francis "Butch" Macansantos, Baguio-based poet-fictionist:

"And I have fallen under the surface of your love
Like a boat under the sea.
Like a boat
I was old
with desire,
And now my
brows are old-
ened still with
magic."

—"Song," by Dumaguete-based poet Cesar Ruiz Aquino

Marlinda Angbetic Tan, Cebu-based poet and newspaper editor:

"Yes, yours, my love, is the right human face.
I in my mind had waited for this long,
Seeing the false and searching for the true,
Then, found you as a traveler finds a place
Of welcome suddenly amid the wrong
Valleys and rocks and twisting roads...
Your open heart,

Simple with giving, gives the primal deed,
The first good world, the blossom, the blowing seed,

The hearth, the steadfast land, the wandering sea,

Not beautiful or rare in every part,
But like yourself, as they were meant to be."
—"The Confirmation," by Scottish poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

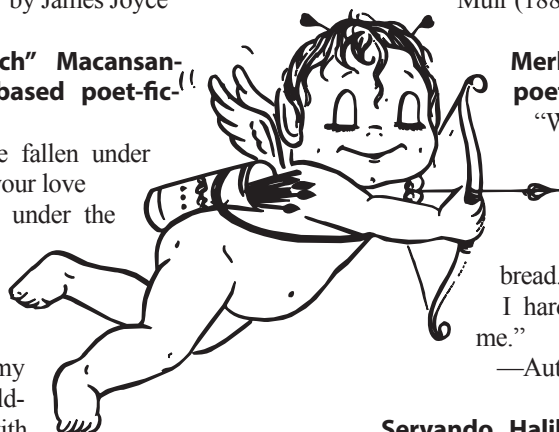
Merlie Alunan, Tacloban-based poet-teacher:

"When I first met you, you were like wine.
The taste of you burnt my mouth.
Now you are like morning bread.
I hardly taste you, but you sustain me."
—Author unknown

Servando Halili, Zamboanga-based critic and teacher:

"My love
Is like the grasses
Hidden in the deep mountain:
Though its abundance increases,
There is none that knows."
—Ono No Yoshiki, translated by Arthur Waley

The Filipino writers are members of the National Committee on the Literary Arts of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, which is celebrating February as the National Arts Month. (*Inquirer*)



'Eat' producers take Joey's side

By **MARINEL R. CRUZ**
INQUIRER

There will be no sanctions for Joey de Leon.

"Of course we understand what he went through. When we asked him to avoid talking about the issue, we only wanted to protect him," said TV producer Malou Choa-Fagar.

Inquirer Entertainment had sought her reaction to statements made by comedian-TV host Joey de Leon on the Saturday show biz talk program, "StarTalk."

According to Joey, producers of the variety game show "Eat... Bulaga!"—where he is one of the main hosts—on GMA 7 earlier advised him not to comment on rumors resulting from the Feb. 4 stampede at the PhilSports Arena in Pasig. GMA 7 is a parent company of INQ7.net.

Seventy-four people died and about 500 were injured among the 30,000 who had turned up at the arena to join the first anniversary celebration of "Bulaga's" rival show on ABS-CBN, "Wowowee!"

Choa-Fagar is an executive of Television and

Production Exponents Inc. (Tape), which produces "Eat... Bulaga!"

Text messages circulated after the stampede alleged that Joey told viewers of his program that same day: "Dito na kayo; mga buhay ang tao dito (Stick with us; people here stay alive)."

"Pinigilan ko po ang sarili ko ng isang linggo. Pinagbawalan ako ng 'Eat... Bulaga!' Pinagbigyan ko sila. Mahirap pala (I kept to myself for a week. I was asked not to comment on it. It's difficult)," a tearful Joey said on "StarTalk." "Pagalitan n'yo na ako dahil sinuway ko kayo; tanggalin n'yo na ako sa programa. Sarili ko ito, pinagtatanggol ko (Scold me, fire me... I have to defend myself)."

After INXS—Queen?

By **MARINEL R. CRUZ**
INQUIRER

Rock star wannabes in these parts, who dream of slugging it out in the phenomenal reality TV show "Rock Star," will get that chance when Star World holds Asian auditions in April, said a network executive.

"But our Hong Kong office is still not saying where in Asian country it will be held," said Sasa Tan Carlos, marketing manager of Cable Technology Asia Corp., a member of Star Group Limited.

Last season's "Rock Star," produced by Mark Burnett Productions ("The Apprentice," "Survivor," "The Contender") and aired twice a week on Star World, was a worldwide search for a new lead singer for top '80s band INXS from Australia.

Auditions for the previous season were conducted on six continents, excluding Asia, noted Carlos.

"I think the show's producers were very impressed with the overwhelming interest that the show generated in Asia during the first season," she said.

Early speculation is that the next search will be for a replacement for the late Freddie Mercury, front man of the legendary British rock group, Queen.

"Network executives are tight-lipped," said Carlos. "But they have announced that the new season will carry the same format and run for 26 episodes."

She added that last season's hosts, Brook Burke and Dave Navarro, will be retained.

Carlos also said that, in the event Asian contenders make it to the final round, they will be flown to the United States in May.

"Rock Star" features an elimination format similar to Fox's "American Idol." Judging is based on viewer's SMS votes as well as ratings given by members of the featured band.

The winner will join the band on a worldwide concert tour and collaborate on the group's new album.

Last season's winner is Canadian JD Fortune. The 11-week search ended in September. Fortune is now touring with INXS.

Fortune figured in a three-way fight for the title with American Marty Casey and Fil-Aus-sie MiG Ayesa.

OPINYON

A nation of victims

Maybe because Feb. 25 is approaching, thoughts of the once famous and revered political uprising known as the EDSA People Power Revolution of 1986 come to mind. I know that the glory and popularity of People Power is but a memory for most, given the apparent lack of enthusiasm and participants in anniversary celebrations in the past decade. Yet, People Power is a valid force, an eternal option for change, and possibly the path of transformation of a nation of victims.

Colonization by Spain made us wholesale victims. Conquest by America made us wholesale victims for a second time. And the short but brutal occupation by Japan made wholesale victims of us for a third time. It seemed to many of us, and to many in the world at large, that the grant of independence by the United States in 1946 finally broke that pattern of wholesale victimization.

It did not.

The victim syndrome is not a simple thing to overcome, especially if it is collective. Personal trauma requires personal therapy, rehabilitation and closure. An individual can more

easily find a sympathetic friend, family group or professional to lend a hand. But a whole people cannot just be put under therapy and a program of rehabilitation. Who could do that except another nation or several nations?

A rape victim does not recover automatically after the rape. That is why the victim syndrome is called a syndrome and not a mere incident. When

Spain, the United States and Japan relinquished their domination over the Filipino people, the rape of colonization stopped. The victim syndrome that developed over 400 years, however, was at its accumulated strongest and was begging for therapy, a rehabilitation process and a fitting closure.

There was none. No nation in a better, wiser and richer state was simply willing to hold the hands of a whole people, comfort and give solace to them and take them through a collective journey of remembering, understanding, processing, learning, distilling, internalizing and releasing a horrible centuries-long trauma. Instead, a weak and broken people had to swim in waters full of sharks and fellow victims, the winners and losers of a world war.

battered country that was reeling from a devastation it had never experienced before had to depend on itself after 400 years of being told what to do.

Depending on oneself is a necessary step toward maturity, whether political, economic or social. It is like a baby slowly learning how to crawl, how to stand, how to walk, how to talk en route to boyhood. Babies, though, have parents who not only guide them through the process but also to protect and nourish them. Nobody felt like being a parent to the Philippines, and the example of parity rights for an exiting colonizer smacked more of extended exploitation than of protection and nurturance of Filipinos.

Wholesale victims, then, had to bring themselves out of the victim syndrome by themselves, threatened by a global environment that was scrambling for the crumbs that the more powerful were not interested in anymore. It did not help any that the end of World War II segued to the Cold War, which deeply and destructively affected Asia. As one historical trauma was begging for closure, a new trauma was being inflicted, as the Philippines became a secondary battlefield in the conflict between America and the communists.

In the end, Filipinos became wholesale victims for a fourth time.

Victims are losers. Until they rise above their



Glimpses

By JOSE MA. MONTELIBANO
INQ7.NET

traumatized state, they will remain losers. Filipinos have not, and Filipinos are losers. While the thought of being a loser is a painful one, the evidence is simply too massive, too visible, too measurable to be denied. Massive poverty, massive corruption, massive conflict and divisiveness—these are the unmistakable trappings of failure, of losers.

The victim syndrome is not a passive disease. Unless it is reversed, it continues to corrode the system even more. While the Philippines is a failed democracy, it has not yet disintegrated. The framework of democracy has not collapsed, not yet. It is greatly weakened, though, and the window of opportunity for its reform and transformation is narrowing and threatens to close completely.

A history of feudalism transitioning to democracy needs inspiring and effective leadership from within the society of victims. Since no one from the outside will serve us as patron, mentor and enabler, Filipinos have no choice but to look to themselves for their own recovery and the pursuit of long-denied dreams. Unfortunately, there have been no great leaders that have emerged to consistently inspire and guide a nation of victims out of their sorry state. Instead, a class of exploiters grows as wholesale victims taste more rape from their own.

The only option left is for leaders and visions to emerge from the least likely of places—from the ranks and imagination of ordinary people who are determined to be extraordinary. The only option left is for followers to believe that they, too, can lead, can dream and can achieve. The only option is for a nation of victims to be a nation of self-help patients, aware that no one else has a greater need and motive to be freed from a collective purgatory.

Let the journey to freedom begin with me, with you, with each one. Let us together be a nation of heroes.

Victims are losers. Until they rise above their traumatized state, they will remain losers. Filipinos have not, and Filipinos are losers. While the thought of being a loser is a painful one, the evidence is simply too massive, too visible, too measurable to be denied. Massive poverty, massive corruption, massive conflict and divisiveness—these are the unmistakable trappings of failure, of losers.

Since the victors had to lick their own wounds after a painful and costly war, they were not in a very good position to nurse other nations back to health. And the losers were all trying to get back on their feet in an environment where only the fittest survived and the less fit slid deeper into an expanded victim syndrome. When independence was granted to the Philippines, it meant that a

Stories artifacts tell

Filipinos usually have to be reminded that in our long history, our country's oldest friend is not Japan, the United States or even Spain, which ruled us from 1565-1898. The oldest friend of the Philippines is China. We see this from the archeological artifacts recovered from land and sea in different parts of the country. Whenever my students visit the National Museum, they are so overwhelmed by the display of Oriental ceramics that they vow never to look at another blue and white artifact again for the next 10 years. What is usually lost on them is that these often broken and incomplete pieces of ceramics document a relationship of trade and friendship that goes even beyond recorded history.

One can only wonder what kind of historical records on the Philippines will be found in China. What little I have read usually concerns trade, specifically the "Nanhai Trade" when the Chinese traded silk and porcelain for raw and finished products from the area they called the "South Seas."

The Chinese had boats that covered both the Eastern and Western seas. There was no global positioning equipment at the time but they found their directions through the stars and timed their outbound and homeward voyages according to the monsoons. Trading ships left China in the winter months and sailed with the north wind behind them, and returned in the summer. There were two routes: the Western route went via Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Java and reached as far as Zanzibar in Africa. The Eastern route is

what concerns us because this passed the Philippines, Borneo and the Moluccas.

It must also be noted here that the Chinese porcelain that has been found in the Philippines sometimes came through Arab trading ships.

Aside from Chinese porcelain, archeological sites in the Philippines have yielded artifacts from Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia, making us wonder even more if these were all brought by Chinese and Arab traders or whether there was direct trade with ships from these neighboring countries. My fascination with these now collectible pieces of porcelain led me to join the Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines, which holds a monthly lecture on various

aspects of the subject. I rarely miss the erudite lectures of Rita Ching Tan who is one of the leading experts on porcelain in the country today. It is possible, given the current research, not only to identify and date excavated ceramics but, more importantly, to sometimes trace the kiln in China where the piece was made and thus trace out on a map the route traders took to our shores.

What interests me more than the beauty of excavated ceramics is their use in pre-colonial times. For example, what use was a celadon brush washer or a blue and white bird feeder to a pre-Hispanic Filipino? What did they put in the numerous jar-lets, saucers and bowls found in pre-Hispanic graves? Why is it that there are many

small vessels found in Luzon compared to bigger pieces in Mindanao?

When one looks at the type and distribution of the excavated artifacts, one can surely find a story, or a pattern. Then one must ask what the pre-colonial Filipino gave the Chinese and Arab traders in exchange for these porcelain pieces. Naturally, the trading ships needed fresh water, food and other provisions, but there must have been more items being bartered.

Offhand one would imagine that the Chinese came for pearls and bird's nests. They were also on the lookout for "beautiful maidens," and one wonders if some of them were sourced from our shores.

A list of goods exchanged is compiled in a 1985 publication of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society West Malaysia Chapter, entitled "A Ceramic Legacy of Asia's Maritime Trade." The list may not be complete, but it says a lot not just about trade, but taste in general—what was considered valuable or even exotic. The more predictable items would be ivory tusks, gongs of gold and silver, woven mats and various textiles like silk and cotton. Then there are the semi-precious stones like amber, agate and cat's eye. In the Philippines, people coveted metals like lead, tin, silver, bronze and steel. I remember reading in another source that Filipinos brought tribute to China that included tortoise shell and green parrots!

Cloves, nutmeg, rosewater, rose apple (Eugenia jambosa), sandalwood benzoin and civet are ordinary on a list that include Arabian glass and white yaks. What I found interesting are: palm leaves (what were they used for, and how were they preserved after being cut from the tree?), kingfisher feathers, and even peacock feathers.

Offhand one would imagine that the Chinese came for pearls and bird's nests. They were also on the lookout for "beautiful maidens," and one wonders if some of them were sourced from our shores.

Rhinoceros horn I always presumed to be used as medicine or aphrodisiacs, but there were different types: semi-transparent, medicinal, decorative and "ordinary" (whatever that meant). The Chinese also presented gifts like sedan chairs, umbrellas and swords. Copper coins were accepted currency in Southeast Asia, and these were so much in demand that it came to a point when the coins actually became scarce in China itself.

E. Arsenio Manuel sounded the challenge when he declared, "Where history ends anthropology begins." Archeology has always fascinated me not for the excavated artifacts themselves but for the stories these artifacts tell.

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu.



Looking Back

By AMBETH OCAMPO
INQUIRER

SAMU'T SARI



ISLAND VISITOR
Janice C. Ortiz, Philippine Public Works Secretary Hermogenes E. Ebdane and Violeta Centeno of Perfectly Set pose for a souvenir shot during the official's visit to Saipan two weeks ago.



ISLAND VISITOR
Consul General Wilfredo DL Maximo and Philippine Public Works and Highways Secretary Hermogenes E. Ebdane Jr. pose with Nimfa and Leo Cañedo during Ebdane's visit to the island on Jan. 28.



RUBBING ELBOWS
Philippine Public Works and Highways Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., second from right, was recently on-island to swear in the new officers of the local Masonic Lodge. The official later met with members of the local Filipino community. He is shown here with, from left, United Filipino Organization president Roland Pamintuan, Consul General Wilfredo DL Maximo, and Ruby Pamintuan.



SOUVENIR SHOT
Department of Public Works and Highways Secretary Hermogenes E. Ebdane Jr. pose with Malou and Bong Malasarte during the official's visit to Saipan on Jan. 28. Ebdane was on island for the swearing in of the new officers of the local Masonic group.



BEST PLAYER
Elmer Esdrelon receives the award as best player of the game during the semi-finals match between the Samahang Ilonggo Pangasinense vs. Visminda.



BEST PLAYER
Andres Estolas is named the best player of the game during the semi-finals match between LIPS and Cabalen for the United Filipino Organization's 6th UFO Inter-Organizational League.



BEST PLAYER
Ronald Delos Reyes of Cabalen is awarded Best Player of the Game during the Cabalen vs Cavite match of the 6th UFO Inter-Organization Basketball League on Jan. 29 2006. The award was sponsored by the Itsukan Restaurant.